



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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Baucus Grills Ag Secretary Nominee on Cuba Trade

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) U.S. Senator Max Baucus, ranking member of the Finance Committee, today questioned President Bush's designee for Secretary of Agriculture, Gov. Mike Johanns (R-Neb) over the future of food sales to Cuba.

Baucus pressed Johanns for his personal commitment to use discretion available to him as Secretary to fend off bureaucratic attempts to choke off trade with Cuba. Baucus also insisted that Johanns should read and implement the law that made food and medicine sales to Cuba legal in 2000.

"Congress passed legislation in 2000 which emphasized our congressional desire to export agricultural products to Cuba," Baucus said. "I'm asking you to—according to the spirit of that legislation—to aggressively help American farmers and companies to export their products to Cuba."

The senator's spate of questions for the Agriculture Secretary designate came in the wake of discussions at the Treasury Department, in consultation with USDA and State, to reinterpret how the 2000 legislation that made food sales to Cuba legal for the first time in 40 years.

"Senator Baucus played a key role in securing this legislation and the wheat industry is pleased that he raised concerns of over recent Administration actions that threatened future sales to this close neighbor," noted Barbara Spangler, executive director of the Wheat Export Trade Education Committee (WETEC). "It is critical that the new Secretary understand the importance of Cuba to American producers."

Baucus, who has sponsored legislation to end the forty-year-old sanctions against the island nation, traveled to Cuba in December to join several hundred Americans at an Agricultural Trade Negotiation Round in Havana. In 2003, the senator hosted a Montana trade delegation to Cuba and walked away with a \$10 million Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Montana products. After completing the first MOU, Baucus signed a second MOU with Cuba for \$15 million.

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